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VIRGINIA MAN OFFERING MiGs FOR SALE  
FRONT ROYAL, VA

For those concerned with the right to bear arms, consider this -- Jeff Ethell can sell you a Soviet MiG-23 fighter-bomber.

The MiGs are unarmed, at least for domestic sales. And even though they are legal to own, they can't be flown over heavily populated areas or Washington's National Airport. Ethell also advises against straying into restricted military airspace.

Ethell, of Front Royal, came upon the MiGs, of Soviet design but Chinese manufacture, while looking for vintage P-51 warplanes for his small museum.

He ended his small trade mission by getting the U.S. franchise for the planes from the Chinese government. He's had about 100 calls, but no sales yet.

'This just isn't a hot idea,' Ethell said. 'There isn't much of a market for a jet fighter.'

'We're aiming for that wealthy millionaire or Palm Beach socialite - the eccentric person who wants a Russian fighter plane so he can freak people out. But those people don't exactly form a long line at your door,' Ethell said.

The firm advertises in jet-set publications in Los Angeles, South Florida, New York and Texas. But it also deals with arms dealers.

'The voice on the other end says 'How much are the MiGs?' I tell them. They say 'Are they available for shipment?' I say yes. 'When can we get them?' they ask.

'Then I say 'Can you tell me the name of your company?' They say no. 'Well,' I ask 'can you tell me who you are?' They say no.

'That's about as cagey as you can get,' Ethell said. 'There are a lot of unscrupulous gunrunners and arms dealers out there.'

Ethell's small company, Custom Associates Inc., must report all dealings to the FBI, the CIA and the State Department.

Prices range from \$1.5 million to \$8 million depending on the type of plane. It's illegal to own Soviet-made planes in this country.

'We don't want to look sneaky or spooky,' Ethell said. 'I want this to be a straightforward business venture. I don't want to get involved in anything like espionage or that sort of Mickey Mouse stuff.'